DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 066 IR 014 637

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TITLE Classroom of the Year 2001.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Design; *Distance Education; Educational Technology; Educational Trends; *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Instructional Design
IDENTIFIERS *University of South Florida Lakeland

ABSTRACT

Innovative teaching techniques for delivering courses in the 21st century will include use of audio, data, and video in classrooms, as well as transmission to distant sites. Toward this end, the University of South Florida, in opening its newest campus at Lakeland, has built facilities, designed an administrative organization, and provided financial and human resource support systems to create an atmosphere where faculty members can investigate the use of technology in a supportive environment. During the last 2 years, 26 senior faculty members have become part of an effort to incorporate technology to deliver part or all of a course. The facilities and organizational structure of the Lakeland campus incorporate a four channel receiving and sending system linking them with four other campuses and auxiliary receiving sites, and courses have been designed to use this instructional technology. Continuing evaluation of those courses indicates that, although there have been some technical problems, the number of students reporting that they would take another course using technology increased from 80% to 100% over three semesters. (DB)

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Classroom of the Year 2001

Patricia Gill* & Carmen Myers*

ABSTRACT

Innovative teaching techniques for delivering courses in the 21st century will include use of audio, data, and video in classrooms, as well as, transmission to distant sites. Toward this end, the University of South Florida, in opening its newest campus at Lakeland, has built facilities, designed an administrative organization, and provided financial and human resource support systems to create an atmosphere where faculty members can investigate the use of technology in a supportive environment. During the last two years, twenty-six University of South Florida senior faculty members have become part of an effort to incorporate technology to deliver part or all of a course. This paper will describe the facilities and organizational structure of the Lakeland campus, review some redesigned courses that incorporate the use of instructional technology, and explain the data collection system used to evaluate the use of technology in instructional delivery.

INTRODUCTION

"Innovative teaching techniques through educational technology will be used whenever practicable to deliver courses in order to have the best of the University's senior professors available to students at regional campuses, enhance space utilization and improve instruction," was one of the planning assumptions used to design the fourth regional campus of the University of South Florida in Lakeland, which opened in January 1988. To a greater extent than any other facility in Florida's history, the campus building was designed to take advantage of instructional technology in meeting the higher education needs of citizens in a three county service area. To implement this plan, an atmosphere conducive to instructional innovation was reflected in the facilities, administrative structure, technical support, and the budget designated for innovative course design projects.

FACILITIES

Campus facilities were designed to include state of the art audio, video, and data transmission lines into every classroom and administrative office. The campus design incorporates a four channel receiving and sending Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) system. The system links the Lakeland campus with the four other campuses and auxiliary receiving sites throughout the university's service area which extends over 15 counties. Using the ITFS system, faculty members located at the home campus or in the studios on the Lakeland campus, present their course material, and have audio interaction with the students at the distant site through a telephone system and a site facilitator.

The local area computer network is composed of 40 faculty/staff and 110 student stations, which use AT&T Star Lan software and data transmission lines linked to a regional data center. This linkage enables access to computer programs among the colleges, campuses, students' homes or workplace, and other sites statewide. In addition, students using the system also have access to on-line library holdings of the nine universities in the state system.

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ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The campus administration is comprised of a Director/Executive Officer, Associate Director for Student Services, and four Program Administrators. The Campus Administrative Staff work with the home campus Department Chairs to identify faculty members wishing to redesign courses using innovative teaching methods. Participatory management is accomplished through Administrative, Academic, and Staff councils that meet regularly and make recommendations to the Director/Executive Officer about solutions to campus problems, improvements of current operations, and plans for future development.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Technical support for faculty redesigning courses to incorporate the use of innovative instructional methods is provided by making available word processing and graphic design services, television and computer technicians assistance, and the skills of an Instructional Design Specialist. The role of the Instructional Specialist is to suggest methods of using technology in reformatting courses, coordinate the print and non-print material development, and design a data collecting system for formative and summative evaluation.

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

Since January of 1988, twenty-six faculty members have been involved in designing courses to use innovative instructional methods. These faculty members come from various colleges of the university such as Education, Engineering, Arts and Letters, Social and Behavioral Science, Business, and Natural Sciences. Each project proposal, developed jointly by the faculty member and the Instructional Design Specialist, includes a description of the course, course objectives, instructional methods selected to achieve the desired objectives, and an outline of the cost of the project, which includes the materials, travel, and staff and faculty time needed to complete the project. Instructional methods of delivery are selected based on a analysis of the course content and objectives, and the strengths and interests of the faculty member in the various technologies available at the campus. Final approval of the project is made by the Campus Director, the College Dean, and the Department Chair.

Of particular interest are the projects designed by faculty members from the College of Arts and Letters, the College of Education, and the College of Business. Students who enroll in a redesigned Shakespeare course, developed by a College of Arts and Letters faculty member, use video tape lectures for independent study, participate in discussions lead by a teaching assistant, and attend seminars conducted by the professor, supported by a weekly telephone question and answer session between professor and students. The video tape lectures incorporate dramatizations of important scenes from Shakespeare's plays presented by student actors in costume, readings from Shakespeare by other faculty members, and slides illustrating concepts such as the wrath of God, and courtly love, to complement the lectures delivered by the professor dressed in period costume.

Another course developed by the College of Education, School of Library and Information Science, addresses the use of bibliographic resources. Using live ITFS transmissions, the professor reaches 66 students at four locations simultaneously. This course is designed to utilize a teaching assistant at each site who leads discussions, presents video tapes describing the format of major bibliographic resources, proctors tests, and manages other aspects of the course requirements.

In a course redesigned by a College of Business faculty member, video taped lectures of the professor describing major concepts, and problem-solving sessions led by teaching assistants are used. In addition, computer-assisted case studies designed to demonstrate the capability of computer programs in analyzing statistical data, and meetings with the professor to address student concerns complete the design of the business statistics course. Although students must attend the problem solving sessions as assigned, students may view lectures by the professor and complete the computer-assisted material at a time of their choice. This format enables the College of Business to serve 500 students, in 19 sections, on three campuses managed by one professor.

EVALUATION

Data was collected to examine the course management structure, evaluate faculty acceptance toward use of technology in course delivery, describe students' response to the innovative design, and identify technical problems associated with non-traditional instructional delivery. At the beginning of the semester, students completed a questionnaire to assess how students' prefer to learn, to determine previous involvement in the use of innovative technology, and to collect demographic information. At the conclusion of the course, students were surveyed to assess whether they perceived the experience with instructional technology as positive or negative, if the course materials supported the course objectives, and if the course management system was satisfactory. Where possible, a comparison of the grade point average of students attending a redesigned course as compared with those attending a traditional course is conducted.

Results of data collected in 1988 and 1989 indicate that technical problems with the transmission capabilities of the ITFS system exist, and that students experienced problems with the telephone transmission system to the classroom. In addition, the data reveals that the percentage of students enrolled who have previously taken a course using technology increases each semester. Students reporting that they would take another course using technology increased from 80 to 100 percent over a three semester period. Students enrolled in education courses indicated they prefer to learn in groups, while engineering students indicate they prefer to work independently. An analysis of the class grade point average of students enrolled in the same class using traditional delivery systems as compared to those using technology do not appear to differ.

CONCLUSIONS

The classroom of the 21st century has been designed, and efforts to improve instruction and ensure access to higher education at distant sites are underway. Of particular importance to faculty members deliberating the incorporation of the use of technology in their course delivery are concerns regarding faculty load factors, how faculty will be compensated and rewarded for participation, and ownership of creative material developed. If the classroom of the 21st century conceptualized by these innovators is to flourish, funding must be ensured to provide adequate support personnel to assist faculty and students, maintain and upgrade the technology, and provide assistance to the faculty in redesigning courses. Along with the university's stated promise in its long range plans to expand the use of technology in course delivery, continuing faculty commitment to the use of these innovative practices rather than to traditional teaching/learning methods must occur. The question of whether all these forces operating in concert will meet the challenge of the classroom of the 21st century remains unanswered.